

C.I.A. Infiltration of Press Overseas Viewed as Influencing News Received

by Americans

By NICHOLAS M. HORROCK

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 8—The Central Intelligence Agency's network of agents and intelligence officers in news organizations around the world has often had the effect of influencing news reports received by Americans both here and abroad, according to present and former intelligence officers.

These sources said that although the C.I.A. had not set out to provide misinformation to the American people, its infiltration of news organizations had frequently had that effect.

William E. Colby, who stepped down as Director of Central Intelligence late last month, said in a recent interview that the agency was "not engaged in an effort to manipulate the American press," although he also acknowledged that some C.I.A.-generated misinformation might trickle back to this country.

However, a series of interviews with other former intelligence officers disclosed that the infiltration of foreign-based news organizations and the publishing of books and papers had resulted in C.I.A.-engendered news flowing regularly to the American public.

'Planting' of Stories

Two former intelligence officers said that possibly the most damaging practice had been the C.I.A.'s "planting" of stories in the foreign press, many of which were based on misinformation. The stories, designed to confuse and disrupt Communist opponents, often ended up in the American press, these sources said.

As one source described the process:

"You place a story in Bangkok, for instance, in a small paper, maybe one with C.I.A. support, and it gets picked up by a larger paper and then,

possibly, by a foreign news service, or Paris Match. The next step will see it used by Reuters or an American news service and coming back to the United States."

This source said that to plant a story in a foreign press outlet, particularly if the item was not true, the agency had to have an agent within the news organization who could get the story printed.

He said that Mr. Colby's assertion that the C.I.A. had never attempted to plant stories in news services such as Reuters might be "technically" correct, but that in fact the source he had planted stories in other outlets that were in turn picked up by Reuters and other news services.

Several sources said that in the cold war in the 1950's, the C.I.A.'s usual practice was to finance or set up newsmen in foreign countries, although it also paid editors and writers for many foreign publications.

Recruiting of Journalists

Now, these sources said, the practice at the C.I.A. is to recruit individual journalists as agents. One of the sources said that the problem with this approach from the standpoint of influencing news reports was that the man on the intelligence payroll was "conditioned" by his relationship with the agency and was therefore not likely to write things that might displease it.

Mr. Colby said in an interview that he had stopped the C.I.A. practice of recruiting agents from among full time staff members of American news organizations, but he said that he regarded using "stringers"—journalists who sell articles to the various news organizations—and placing Americans in overseas news organizations as acceptable methods.

In the interviews the sources described a series of situations in which the C.I.A.'s contacts in journalism were in a position to influence news coverage:

¶The C.I.A. sent an American intelligence officer to a Western European country where he ran an English-language newspaper as a "cover" for espionage. The paper was read by American military personnel as well as Americans living and working in the country. Moreover, this intelligence officer gained a reputation as an expert on the country and wrote for major American news organizations as a "stringer."

¶The C.I.A. secretly paid as an agent a well-known writer for a Scandinavian news service. It did so to get information from him. But, intelligence sources acknowledged, the payments had the effect of making him "pro-American." The news service he worked for feeds dispatches to American press services.

¶In 1968 the C.I.A. attempted to get Sam Jaffe, then a foreign correspondent for ABC, to act as an agent and obtain information from Chinese Communist contacts.

Mr. Jaffe said in an interview that while he was stationed in Hong Kong, he was prepared to make contact with a Chinese official for the C.I.A., but he said that ABC recalled him from his assignment before the contact could be made.

Until July 1973, the C.I.A. operated Forum World Features, a news syndicate in London, which brought articles from a wide range of journalists and placed them in English-language newspapers. The syndicate was registered as a corporation in Delaware and at different times such well-known American businessmen as John Hay Whitney, owner of THE

International Herald Tribune based in Paris, and Richard Mellon Scaife, the Pittsburgh banker, were listed as directors.

Mr. Whitney and Mr. Scaife have previously declined to comment on this situation.

Apparent Payment Conduit

Part of the operation, authoritative sources confirmed, was designed as a conduit for secret payments to foreign journalists working for the C.I.A., but the London-based syndicate was also used, they said, for some propaganda pieces. Some of its articles were carried by English-language papers around the world.

There is no total count of the number of newspapers or reporters that the C.I.A. has financed abroad, but former intelligence officers say that cultivation of news agents is extensive.

For instance, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence said in its report on Chile that one important aspect of the C.I.A.'s operations had been recruitment of journalists working for El Mercurio, the Santiago daily newspaper that is the largest in Chile, as well as television and radio stations. These journalists contributed to local news reports that were often picked up by the American press, the report said.

It also said that the C.I.A. had been able to send to Chile more than a dozen operatives disguised as journalists, and that these operatives actually wrote for foreign news publications.